

As we come to the close of 2009, I'd like to take the opportunity to wish you and your families a happy holiday season. It is this time of year that we gather to celebrate with our families the birth of Jesus Christ. Earlier in the month those of the Jewish faith celebrated Hanukkah to commemorate the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. I'm glad to have this opportunity to stop and give thanks for all our blessings as a nation.

Americans are fortunate to have the service and protection of our men and women in uniform. They do a tremendous job fighting for our freedoms, liberties and ideals of our country at home and abroad. Their families also give of themselves in sacrifice to this nation while their loved ones serve in harms way. I look forward to visiting our service members abroad in the early part of this next year. You don't get a full appreciation of the talent and courage these folks display until you've seen it first hand.

Here in the First District, I've spent time this season volunteering with local food pantries, the Salvation Army, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption's "Santa's Wish List Program", the American Red Cross "Holiday Cards for Heroes" program, and the Marine Corps Toys for Tots Program. It's refreshing to see so many folks selflessly spending their time in support of others. While it's important to remember others during the holiday season, I hope you and your loved ones can find time at other points of the year to support organizations in your communities, which many folks are dependent upon in these tough economic times.

Lastly, we should take this time to pause and look towards the coming year to think about the opportunities we can take to improve ourselves and our communities. Make commitments to take classes, volunteer with community organizations and lend a helping hand to a neighbor in need.

I look forward to seeing many of you across the First District this holiday season, and if not I hope you have a Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year, and may God bless you and continue to bless America.

*Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.*